

# Forward Editor's Introduction

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JENNIFER A. REIMER

Dear Fellow Readers,

As Fall's gray, woolly clouds and lush, golden light spill across the small corner of the world I currently call home, I find myself thinking about constriction. Perhaps it's simply the inevitable turning inward that comes with the change of season, when the pull of warm, spicy beverages and woodsmoke (or hiss and clang of the radiator) draw us into ourselves and our nests. But perhaps you'll notice this year's *Forward* installment is looking more svelte than in recent years. And, no, *Forward* is not, like so many Americans, on Ozempic. It simply has become more difficult to secure presses' permission to reprint material.

I understand this difficulty as another sign of a seemingly global turn inwards. Restriction, constriction, and exclusion are (pardon the pun) IN and openness, generosity, and inclusion are OUT. Global economic growth is shrinking, compared to last year. Banned Booked Weeks in the United States coincided with the news that US President Biden approved building portions of the infamous border wall with Mexico and will also begin deporting Venezuelans. Another headline hitting my inbox this week? Institutions of higher education in the United States are beginning to ban diversity statements. Each news cycle continues to show us more of a world turning towards toxic ethnonationalism and divisiveness across countries, governments, and territories.

Yet, the *Forward* excerpts convened in this issue remind me of the promises of transnational American studies scholarship—the opportunities to locate and celebrate the broadening and expansion of the field. Instead of adhering to the disciplinary and geographic boundaries that might confine and constrict, our urgent works seeks the broadest and most inclusive cultural conversations, convening often disconnected sites of inquiry from around the globe.

The release of this issue of *JTAS* will coincide with the American Studies Association's (ASA) Annual Meeting in Montreal. The journal, in partnership with the ASA's International Committee, will award the 2023 Shelley Fisher Fishkin Prize for International Scholarship in Transnational American Studies Scholarship to the late Y-Dang Troeung for her groundbreaking book, [Refugee Lifeworlds: The Afterlife of the Cold War in Cambodia](#), an

excerpt from which we are honored to reprint [here](#), accompanied by a short introduction penned by the author's husband, the accomplished scholar Christopher B. Patterson.

We are delighted to share the [Introduction](#) from [Markus Heide's \*Framing the Nation, Claiming the Hemisphere\*](#), which examines the national and transnational imagination in travel reports written by American authors between 1770 to 1830. Operating from the premise that we must understand the transnational as a fundamental element of the US's national emergence, Heide's work shifts our attention from a discursive "domestication" of North American space to an interest in the Othering of what lies beyond national borders (4). Heide does so by close reading representations of what he names *contact scenarios* in North America, the transatlantic world, and around the globe. Recommendation: Watch for Heide's particular attention to questions of genre and form as inherently entangled with a necessarily transnational nation-building project. Readers of this journal may also be particularly captivated by chapters 5 and 6, in which Heide unpacks how the new nation is represented in writing about journeys abroad. These two chapters concentrate on Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, regions which, he writes, became highly relevant in discourses of national emergence, as well as in the articulation of imperialist ideas that favored further expansion (29).

Fast forward around one hundred years and we find ourselves in the chaotic and contested landscape of American ethnonational (re)formations taken up by [Yu Tokunaga](#) in [\*Transborder Los Angeles: An Unknown Transpacific History of Japanese-Mexican Relations\*](#). This book explores the social history of interethnic relations between Japanese and Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles County from 1924 to 1942 by paying careful attention to international relations between Japan, Mexico, and the United States. Tokunaga emphasizes the overlapping experiences of racialized minorities intersecting around agricultural life as part of a single narrative of transpacific history. His articulation of agricultural life as a "transpacific workplace, a contested site in which local relations functioned within a complex and increasingly precarious international context around the Pacific" (6–7) illuminates how Asian and Latin American immigrants lived and worked within the forces of a white-dominant US society, as well as the changing relationships between their home countries and the United States.

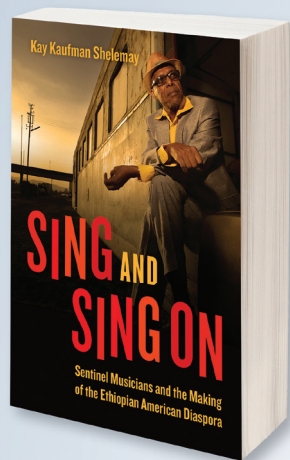
While the years 1924–1942 marked another period of constriction and exclusion in the US (and Tokunaga's work does not shy away from division), in the spirit of expansion, I appreciate his razor-sharp attention to moments of accommodation and solidarity in his analysis of the tri-racial relationship between white landowners, Japanese farmers, and Mexican laborers. Labor historians, social movement scholars, Californians, and lovers of superfoods and antioxidants worldwide may want to check out Chapter 3, which covers an underexamined aspect of the El Monte Berry Strike of 1933. Spoiler: Tokunaga's research shows how the strike affected the development of a transborder ethnic Japanese community in the US-Mexico borderlands (Mexicali). Not-a-spoiler: What did the ethnic Japanese in Mexicali do when the El Monte Strike forced many to choose between ethnic solidarity and Mexican nationalism? You'll have to read the book to find out!

Thrilling to this literary scholar and love of spy films are the two titles which take on literary internationalism and the Cold War era (broadly). [Harilaos Stecopoulos's \*Telling America's Story to the World: Literature, Internationalism, Cultural Diplomacy\*](#) traces a genealogy from World War II to the end of the Cold War and beyond to examine how state and state-affiliated agencies deployed US literature overseas for propaganda purposes, which had uneven and often unexpected consequences for the literary ambassadors who found themselves enmeshed in state institutionalism. Centered on six historical case studies drawn from the 1940s through the 1980s, the book argues that much of postwar American literature is a literature of diplomacy. Stecopoulos's research reveals how some twentieth- (and twenty first-) century writers responded to cultural diplomatic work (sometimes actual propaganda service) by producing work which "envision[s] new forms of transmission and connection, forms that reconceived the very issues of mutuality central to internationalism in the first place" (5). By focusing on the crosscultural contact resulting from time abroad, US writers from diverse backgrounds and different aesthetic approaches often found themselves reconsidering their own US affiliations. *Telling America's Stories to the World* shows how these reconsiderations enabled the creation of new internationalist art with counterhegemonic potential.

If not for this book, I would never have known that the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) at one time considered dropping Russian translations of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* over the Soviet Union. According to Stecopoulos, "the organization believed that the formal challenge of an Eliot poem or a Faulkner novel both testified to the unique subjectivity of the artist and elicited from the reader and viewer a heightened sense of individualism and autonomy, values that cold warriors most vigorously wanted to promote in countering the spread of Soviet Marxism" (7). For all those haters of modernism and formalism (but also for all those lovers of tough close reading who are sick of being told that what they do has no practical application), *JTAS* gifts you the following words from Stecopoulos: "Irreverent and individualistic, literary modernism could thus be imagined as a weapon in an effective cultural campaign against the suppressions of global communism" (7). And they say you can't get a job with an English major.

Transnational literary connections in unexpected (and cold) places are also the subject of Brian Goodman's [The Nonconformists: American and Czech Writers across the Iron Curtain](#). We are able to reproduce the official full-length book jacket copy here: "In some indescribable way, we are each other's continuation," Arthur Miller wrote of the imprisoned Czech playwright Václav Havel. After a Soviet-led invasion ended the Prague Spring, many U.S.-based writers experienced a similar shock of solidarity. Brian Goodman examines the surprising and consequential connections between American and Czech literary cultures during the Cold War—connections that influenced art and politics on both sides of the Iron Curtain. American writers had long been attracted to Prague, a city they associated with the spectral figure of Franz Kafka. Goodman reconstructs the Czech journeys of Allen Ginsberg, Philip Roth, and John Updike, as well as their friendships with nonconformists like Havel, Josef Škvorecký, Ivan Klima, and Milan Kundera. Czechoslovakia, meanwhile, was home to a literary counterculture shaped by years of engagement with American

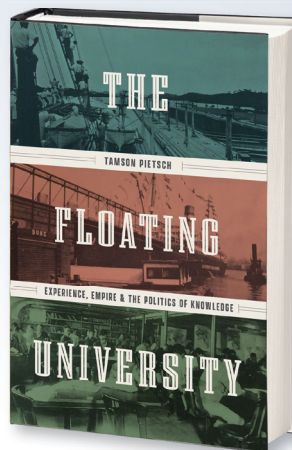
# CHICAGO



**Sing and Sing On**  
Sentinel Musicians and the Making of the Ethiopian American Diaspora

**Kay Kaufman Shelemay**  
“A musically and academically engaging project, it’s also an important account of personal human suffering, and the art and solidarity that rises out of it.”—*Songlines*

Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology  
PAPER \$35.00



**The Floating University**

Experience, Empire, and the Politics of Knowledge

**Tamson Pietsch**  
“Buoyant with white American assurance, confident in intellectual sea power, this floating university became an allegory for imperial globalization, leaving most passengers unable to disembark from their own self-absorption”—Warwick Anderson, University of Sydney

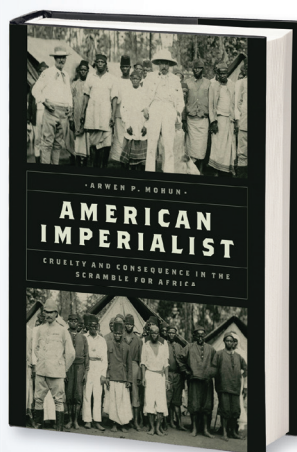
CLOTH \$40.00

**American Imperialist**

Cruelty and Consequence in the Scramble for Africa

**Arwen P. Mohun**  
“Mohun reveals how Dorsey’s time in Africa embodied the ‘remarkable influence of American money and expertise’ in imperial ventures during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”—Jeannette Eileen Jones, author of *In Search of Brightest Africa*

CLOTH \$30.00

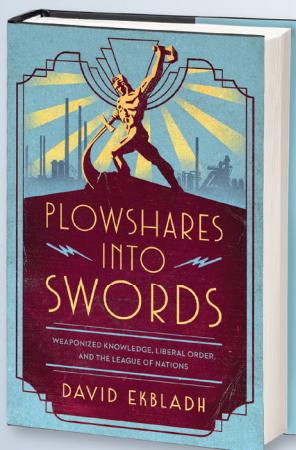
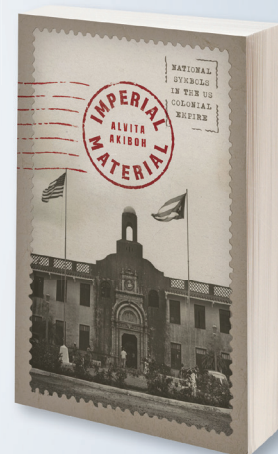


**Imperial Material**

National Symbols in the US Colonial Empire

**Alvita Akiboh**  
“This is terrific scholarship. Akiboh presents a highly original, impressively researched, clearly written, and helpfully illustrated study of the official accoutrements of US imperialism.”  
—Bartholomew Sparrow, University of Texas at Austin

PAPER \$30.00

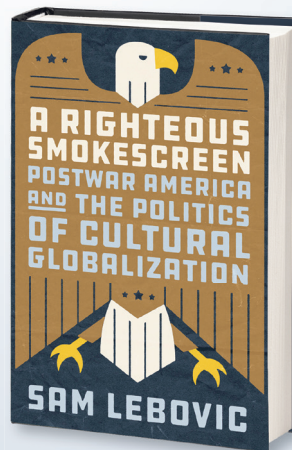


**Plowshares into Swords**

Weaponized Knowledge, Liberal Order, and the League of Nations

**David Ekbladh**  
“Ekbladh gives us fresh insights into the intellectual latticework of the League of Nations and the role that American institutions and thinkers played in its making. Ekbladh’s research is astonishing and the significance of his findings is vital for readers today.”—Jeremy Adelman, Princeton University

CLOTH \$40.00



**A Righteous Smokescreen**

Postwar America and the Politics of Cultural Globalization

**Sam Lebovic**  
“Lebovic’s approach is wildly innovative and helps us dramatically rethink the postwar US and the limits to the world order it helped construct.”  
—*The New Republic*

CLOTH \$35.00

sources, from *Moby-Dick* and the Beats to Dixieland jazz and rock 'n' roll. Czechs eagerly followed cultural trends in the United States, creatively appropriating works by authors like Langston Hughes and Ernest Hemingway, sometimes at considerable risk to themselves. *The Nonconformists* tells the story of a group of writers who crossed boundaries of language and politics, rearranging them in the process. The transnational circulation of literature played an important role in the formation of new subcultures and reading publics, reshaping political imaginations and transforming the city of Kafka into a global capital of dissent. From the postwar dream of a 'Czechoslovak road to socialism' to the neoconservative embrace of Eastern bloc dissidence on the eve of the Velvet Revolution, history was changed by a collision of literary cultures."

Yes, *JTAS* has long been a fan of Brian Goodman's work. But you don't have to take our word for it! Check out this blurb from Wai Chee Dimock, author of *Weak Planet*: "Eye-opening and unforgettable. Goodman is a wonderful storyteller, and this is a story never told before. Featuring a vibrant continuum of literature, music, and theater linking Czechoslovakia and the United States, this East-West fusion sheds light on Franz Kafka, Václav Havel, and Josef Škvorecký no less than Allen Ginsberg, Philip Roth, and Arthur Miller."

Finally, we are very pleased to present [Chapter 6](#) from [Kay Kaufman Shelemay's](#) meticulously researched study of the forced migration of musicians out of the Horn of Africa, from the 1974 Ethiopian revolution and onwards. The first work of its kind, [Sing and Sing On](#) tells the story of the musicians who were among the first to depart the region, their lives shattered by revolutionary violence, curfews, and civil war. Reconstructing the memories of forced migration, the book traces the challenges musicians faced amidst revolutionary violence and the critical role they played in building communities abroad.

Drawing on the recollections of dozens of musicians, *Sing and Sing On* details personal, cultural, and economic hardships experienced by musicians who have resettled in new locales abroad. Shelemay highlights their many artistic and social initiatives within and beyond a rapidly growing Ethiopian American diaspora. She documents how the pivotal role musicians played in prerevolutionary Ethiopia took on new meanings and contours in the diaspora. Ultimately, Shelemay shows that musicians are uniquely positioned to serve as both guardians and challengers of cultural heritage. Amongst the many treasures Shelemay offers readers was one especially relevant to this once and forever Bay Area gal—the history of Berkeley's (California, US) storied Blue Nile Ethiopian restaurant. Not only was it the first Ethiopian restaurant in the city, it was also the site of a historic date between none other than this writer's parents. What God and injera hath joined together, let no man put asunder.

That's it for 2023, shipmates. As always, if you have the scoop on a noteworthy new book in transnational American studies and you'd like to see it highlighted here, please send [word](#). If you're in Montreal and would like to chat, send me a message through the ASA's conference app.

Stay safe. Stay generous.

Jennifer A. Reimer  
Bend, Oregon, USA

## Forward Selections

The journal wishes to acknowledge the following publishers and to thank these presses for enabling work to be featured in *Forward* in this issue: Temple University Press, for “Debility and the U.S. Bombing of Cambodia” from [Refugee Lifeworlds: The Afterlife of the Cold War in Cambodia](#) by Y-Dang Troeung, pages 71–76. Used by permission of Temple University Press. © 2023 by Temple University. All Rights Reserved. Stockholm University Press for the excerpt by Markus Heide’s *Framing the Nation, Claiming the Hemisphere: Transnational Imagination in Early American Travel Writing (1770–1830)*. <https://doi.org/10.16993/bca> © 2022 by Stockholm University Press; University of California Press for the excerpt from [Transborder Los Angeles: An Unknown Transpacific History of Japanese- Mexican Relations](#), by Yu Tokunaga, © 2022 by Yu Tokunaga. Published by the University of California Press. All Rights Reserved. Permission must be sought from University of California Press for additional uses; Oxford University Press for an excerpt from Harilaos Stecopoulos’s [Telling America's Story to the World: Literature, Internationalism, Cultural Diplomacy](#) (New York: Oxford University Press. Excerpt used with approval of Oxford University Press); Harvard University Press for the text from the dustjacket of Brian K. Goodman’s [The Nonconformists: American and Czech Writers across the Iron Curtain](#); and finally thanks go to The University of Chicago Press for the excerpt “Communities,” from [SING AND SING ON](#) by Kay Kaufman Shelemay, which is used by permission of The University of Chicago Press (© 2022 by The University of Chicago. All Rights Reserved).